Author's response to reviews

Title: Housing equity for health equity--A rights-based approach to the control of Lassa fever in post-war Sierra Leone

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Author's response to reviews: see over
December 18, 2012

To the Editors of BMC International Health and Human Rights:

Please find attached a revised version of our manuscript entitled “Housing equity for health equity—A rights-based approach to the control of Lassa fever in post-war Sierra Leone.” The portion of the manuscript that is revised (one sentence on page 6) is highlighted in yellow. In addition, please see detailed responses to the few remaining reviewer’s comments. As with the previous submissions, the authors have no competing interests, have participated in conceptualizing and writing the manuscript, and concur with its submission and any subsequent revisions. The material is original, has not already been published, and is not being considered for publication elsewhere. Thank you for consideration of this revised manuscript. We believe all the concerns should now be met.

Regards,
Daniel G. Bausch, MD, MPH&TM

RESPONSES TO REVIEWERS AND EDITORS

Reviewer: Elisabeth Fichet-Calvet

Reviewer's report:
Many new items improved the paper, and I have only few comments.
- Again, the text does not fit to the guidelines of the journal
  RESPONSE: With the guidance of the editor, we have elected to keep the format as is.

- Remove figure 1 and just refer to Fichet-Calvet & Rogers because it does not give additional value to the paper.
  RESPONSE: Again with the guidance of the editor, we have elected to keep the present figure.

- Page 5: Where can we get the ref 19?
  RESPONSE: Unfortunately the link to the report on the UNDP website does not seem to work. However, the site also says “For hard copies contact the Communications Specialist at jas.kaminski@undp.org.” Lastly, I have a PDF copy and would be happy to send it to the reviewer.

- Page 6: Authors state that the endemic area expanded recently to the North. But old epidemiological studies in the eighties revealed a seroprevalence of 10 to 15% in villages located in the northern province (McCormick et al 1987). A fatal case in 2010 in this province confirms this old study only, and reflects the improved Lassa detection in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, ref 25 refers to a ProMed mail, which is totally inaccurate till the laboratory publishes the results. Where are the statistics supporting the increasing Lassa fever cases since 2004 in Kenema?
RESPONSE: The increasing number of cases in Kenema since 2004 comes from the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health and Sanitation. Regarding whether or not the endemic area is expanding, as the reviewer knows, surveillance for Lassa fever is inadequate across Sierra Leone as well as the rest of Africa. Thus, most data are soft and there is a lot of speculation. We think that that was clear in the original statement but have nevertheless revised the statement to highlight the point. It now reads: “In fact, according to Sierra Leone Ministry of Health and Sanitation statistics, the number of reported cases of the disease in Kenema has increased every year since 2004 and there is evidence, still to be confirmed, that the endemic area may be expanding to other areas of Sierra Leone based on increasing observation of cases in areas where none had previously been seen [25].